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CABINET MEETING IN CHARLOTTE.

by

Mrs.Jas.A.Fore.

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## CABINET MEETING IN CHARLOTTE.

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Mrs. JAMES A. FORE, Historian Stonewall Chapter, U. D. C.,  
Charlotte, N. C.

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Fifty years ago in an office which is now that of *The Charlotte Daily Observer*, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, called together the members of his Cabinet in the last full meeting of that body. At that meeting it was finally decided to abandon the Southern cause and instructions were issued to General Johnston to surrender, and the terms were specified though these were not accepted. The surrender occurred 50 years ago to-day.

In conclusive proof of this fact, of which many are in ignorance, *The Observer* is presenting herewith a paper by Mrs. J. A. Fore, historian of Stonewall Jackson Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and read at the State Convention in Tarboro. In reply to a letter from her calling attention to an error in the advance proofs of Appleton's Cyclopedia relative to this point, Prof. William E. Dodd admits that Mrs. Fore's contention is right. A letter of similar purport is from Junius Davis, son of a member of the Cabinet who resigned in Charlotte, spent some time here and later went to Florida. Mrs. Fore's article follows:

Miss Rutherford, the historian general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, stated that three States were claiming the last official meeting of the Confederate Cabinet, viz: North Carolina at Abbeville and Georgia at Washington.

The historian of Stonewall Jackson Chapter determined to turn the light on the question and if possible substantiate Charlotte's claim.

There are many prominent citizens in Charlotte who know

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the truth of the matter, but their testimony seemed of no more force than that of the citizens of Abbeville or Washington.

After working for days over old newspaper files, histories and making inquiries, the chapter historian decided to see what President Jefferson Davis had to say in his book—"The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy." He settles the matter absolutely for Charlotte.

It was the good fortune of the writer to find corroborative evidence in an article by Burton H. Harrison, private secretary to Mr. Davis, published in *The Century Magazine* of the date of November, 1883, and in the papers or diary left by Secretary of the Navy, Stephen R. Mallory of Confederate Cabinet, that was published in *McClure's Magazine* of January, 1901, which evidence will be introduced first.

As to President Davis' and the Cabinet's stay in Charlotte, Colonel Harrison writes: "Not far from Charlotte I sent forward a letter to Major Echols, the quartermaster of that post, asking him to inform Mrs. Davis of our approach and to provide quarters for as many of us as possible. The Major rode out to the outskirts of the town and there met us with the information that Mrs. Davis had hastily proceeded toward South Carolina several days before. He said quarters had been found for all the party and that Mr. Davis would be entertained at the house of a Mr. Bates who was a man of Northern birth and the local express agent. Just before we entered the house Mr. Davis received intelligence that President Lincoln had been assassinated and when he communicated it to us everybody's remark was that in Lincoln the Southern States had lost the only refuge in their emergency. There was no expression other than that of surprise and regret and yet we knew none of the particulars of the crime."

Mr. Davis has been accused of giving voice to exultation at the death of Lincoln and it is thought that the man Bates was the falsifier. "Presently," continued Colonel Harrison, "the street was filled by a column of cavalry commanded by Gen. Basil Duke, of Kentucky, just entering the town and to whom Mr. Davis made a brief reply to calls for a speech."

Col. John Taylor Wood, Col. William Preston Johnston, and Col. Frank Lubbock, staff officers, remained in Bates' house with the President. I was carried off by my Hebrew friend, Weill, and most kindly entertained with Mr. Benjamin and St. Martin at his residence.

On Sunday a number of us attended service at the Episcopal Church.

Mr. George Davis, the Attorney General, was entertained by Mr. William Myers, father of Mr. Jack Myers, at the old Myer's home on East avenue, and Mr. Trenholm, who was ill, at the home of Mr. William Phifer on North Tryon street.

In the material collected from different sources, there will necessarily be some repetition of the data. The historian wished to have the testimony of as many as possible of those who took part in that memorable drama of April, 1865.

*McClure's Magazine* of January, 1901, published the diary or papers left by the Secretary of Confederate Navy, Mr. Stephen R. Mallory, written while in prison in 1865 in Fort Lafayette, New York Harbor. Mr. Mallory writes: "On the 16th of April the President, his staff and the Cabinet left Greensboro to proceed still further. In leaving Greensboro, Mr. Reagen, Mr. Breckenridge and Mr. Mallory rode with Mr. Davis and his three aides on horse back, and Mr. Trenholm, Mr. George Davis and Mr. Benjamin, the three other members of the Cabinet, were in an ambulance with General Cooper and other military officers." Mr. Mallory states they stopped one night in Lexington and one in Concord and that they were guests in Concord of Mrs. Victor Barringer, who was exceedingly kind to them. Mrs. Rufus Barringer, widow of General Barringer, says that while there each one of the Cabinet signed his name on the fly leaf of a copy of "Rasselas," and that Dr. Paul Barringer of Virginia has that copy in his possession now.

Mr. Mallory continues: "On the following day we rode into Charlotte. Here the Confederate Government had several public establishments, many local officers and arrangements had been made for the accommodation of Mr. Davis and his Cabinet at private houses. They were received and treated with the ut-

most courtesy. The party remained in Charlotte about a week." He then gives the same account that Mr. Davis does in the "Rise and Fall," continuing that after Johnston accepted Sherman's terms in the time agreed upon, "No other course seemed open to Mr. Davis but to leave the country and his immediate advisers urged him to do so."

I shall give the extracts from Mr. Davis' "Rise and Fall of the Confederacy," from which authority there is no appeal. All writers on the War Between the States since its publication use it as the basis of their material. As he was the person most concerned in the retreat from Richmond, his word in the very nature of the case is absolutely correct.

On pages 682 and 683—second volume, he says: "After it had been decided that General Johnston should attempt negotiations with General Sherman, he left for his army headquarters and I proceeded with my Cabinet and staff toward Charlotte, N. C."

"We arrived at Charlotte on April 18 and I there received on dismounting a telegram announcing that President Lincoln had been assassinated. An influential citizen of the town (Col. William Johnston), who had come to welcome me, was standing near me and after remarking to him in a low voice that I had received sad intelligence, I handed him the telegram. The man who invented the story of my having received the news with exultation had free scope for his imagination as he was not present." This man, evidently was Bates who betrayed the guest whom he had invited to his home.

Page 688—"I therefore, with the concurrence of my Constitutional advisers, addressed General Johnston as follows." This letter is dated April 24, 1865, authorizing General Johnston to enter into negotiations with General Sherman as to terms of surrender.

Page 689—"General Johnston communicated to me the rejection of basis of agreement on the part of United States and a notice from General Sherman of termination of the armistice in 48 hours after noon of April 24, 1865. General Johnston asked for



instructions." He (President Davis) herewith sent instructions to General Johnston which he says were disobeyed.

On the same page President Davis continues: "After the expiration of the armistice, I rode out of Charlotte attended by the members of my Cabinet (except Attorney General Davis, who had gone to see his family residing in that section, and the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Trenholm, who was too ill to accompany me), my personal staff and the cavalry, representing six brigades, numbering about 2,000."

Page 694—"I crossed (the Savannah River) early on the morning of the 4th of May. When I reached Washington, Ga., the Secretary of State, Mr. Benjamin, parted from me to take another route. At Washington, Ga., the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Mallory, left me to attend to the needs of his family.

"The Secretary of War, Mr. Breckenridge, had remained with the cavalry at the crossing of the Savannah River." Mr. Reagen, the Postmaster General, was the only one of the Cabinet who was in Washington with Mr. Davis and was captured with him soon afterward.

It is established beyond a doubt that Mr. Davis and his Cabinet were here in Charlotte for eight days from the 18th of April to the 26th and that when he left here Attorney General Davis and Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Trenholm, did not accompany him, therefore, a full Cabinet could not have been held afterward anywhere. That while here the last deliberations of the Confederacy took place and that the surrender of Johnston's army, consisting of 89,272 men (see "Rise and Fall"), was decided on at Charlotte and that with this surrender the Confederate Government ceased to exist. The expiration of the armistice on the 26th of April meant the surrender and when President Davis reached Abbeville, S. C., there were only four Cabinet members of the defacto Government with him. There was no more State business transacted after leaving Charlotte.

If there had been a meeting of any importance to the Confederacy in Abbeville, S. C., Mr. Davis or Secretary Mallory would have mentioned it. The only allusion to a meeting of any kind is mentioned by Pollard in his "Life of Jefferson Davis."

He says it was composed of the five brigade generals who commanded Mr. Davis' escort, and General Bragg. At this council the disbandment of the troops was decided upon because the men were deserting at every cross-roads to go to their homes, contending that the war had ended anyway. Mr. Mallory confirms Pollard by saying, "In Abbeville the officers of the escort candidly apprised Mr. Davis that they could not depend upon the men, that they regarded the struggle as over." Colonel Harrison also states that when they left Abbeville the party only consisted of some wagons, several ambulances and only 150 cavalry, in contrast with Mr. Davis' assertion that the escort consisted of 2,000 cavalry under five brigade generals, when they left Charlotte.

While the Cabinet was in Charlotte the official meeting place was in *The Observer* building in the editorial room used by Mr. J. P. Caldwell. It was at that time the directors' room of the bank, of which Mr. Dewey was president and who lived upstairs over the bank.

Mrs. John Wilkes, who was a resident of Charlotte at that time, writes in *The Charlotte News* of June 1, 1910: "For a few days this was the Capital of the Confederate States. The last deliberations and Cabinet consultations were held in the building now occupied by the *Charlotte Observer*, then the bank."

The fact remains, however, that the last full meeting was held at the home of Mr. William Phifer in the sick room of Mr. Trenholm, who was ill on his arrival in Charlotte and was taken directly to Mr. Phifer's house and tenderly nursed by the family during the stay there.

Mr. William Phifer, in Dr. J. B. Alexander's *History of Mechenburg County*, says, "The last full meeting of the Confederate Cabinet (and in the recollection of the writer all were present) was held in the west room upstairs in the house now owned by Mr. William Holt. The cause of its meeting there was the fact that Mr. Trenholm, the Secretary of the Treasury, was ill and confined to bed." He remained in the Phifer home several days after President Davis and the other members of the Cabinet left Charlotte.



The older members of this family remember well the different Cabinet officers who came singly and in twos to visit the sick Secretary.

They also have vivid recollections of the flutter of excitement created in the household when word came that there was to be a meeting of the Cabinet in Mr. Trenholm's room, just a short while before their departure for the Southwest. They remember seeing these distinguished men, bowed in sorrow come in a body and pass into the sick room to confer together on the last momentous concerns of the "Lost Cause."

Both of these places are interesting for the reason that the terms of the surrender of Johnston's army was decided on in *The Observer* building and the meeting in the Phifer house was where the notice of the expiration of the armistice was made known to the Cabinet, and the final instructions sent to General Johnston, where the further flight of the President was decided upon, and where the final good-byes were said to the two Cabinet officers who remained in Charlotte.

It is a matter of satisfaction to the people of Charlotte that President Davis, Secretary Mallory and Col. Burton Harrison have confirmed the well-known local fact that the last full Cabinet meetings were held here and that Charlotte was indeed the Capital of the Confederate States for a period of eight days.

MRS. JAMES A. FORE,  
*Historian Stonewall Jackson Chapter, U. D. C.*

Life of Vance—Dowd. Page 469.—Speech in the United States Senate "Before its return Raleigh was uncovered and I had left to join Mr. Davis at Charlotte, where the surrender of General Johnston was authorized and the finality of things brought about."

ADDENDA.

## THE HON. THEODORE S. GARNETT.

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**Address before Virginia Historical Society  
by Capt. W. GORDON McCABE.**

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It is only becoming that in the "Minutes" of the Society there should be some record, however halting, of those who were not only knit to us by ties of long and intimate friendship, but whose loyalty to this association never wavered when our skies were not so bright as they are to-day.

Foremost among these is Judge Theodore S. Garnett of Norfolk, the only name, indeed, stricken from the roll of Life Membership, yet a loss of such grievous import to the community and Commonwealth, to the profession and to the ancient communion to which he belonged, as well as to a large circle of kinsmen, comrades, and friends, that it is difficult to speak of this daring soldier, learned jurist and humble-minded Christian, this most lovable and most loyal of friends, save in terms which to those who did not enjoy the privilege of his intimate friendship must savor of rhetorical extravagance.

But in this presence, at least, where so many of you knew him as he was, one need not fear that imputation. The misgiving is, rather, that you will deem the outline blurred by excess of caution and repression.

Living slightly beyond the Psalmist's limit of three score years and ten, his career was a busy and beneficent one to the end, and though, speaking with rigorous exactness, it was in the main uneventful, yet not a few honors came to him as the years went by, and, as he himself loved most to remember, in "the May of youth and bloom of lustihood" he had known many a "crowded hour of glorious life," and had, on field of battle, won the plaudits of grizzled veterans ere the down was on his cheek. So strenuous indeed was his life from early boyhood,

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